

Greece¹

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For comparisons with other countries in this review on leave provision and early childhood education and care services, please see the cross-country tables at the front of the review (also available individually on the Leave Network website). To contact authors of country notes, see the members page on the Leave Network website.

1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents

Note on leave information: the information given below is based on: (i) leave arrangements for employees in the private sector that are covered by legislation and the National General Collective Agreements (NGCA) signed between the most representative national employers' organisations (SEV, GSEVEE, ESEE, and SETE) and the General Confederation of Labour, which set the uniform minimum provisions for all workers in the private sector²; (ii) leave arrangements for public sector employees that are covered by basic laws and the Code for Civil Servants and relevant legislation.

i. Private sector (responsibility of the Department of Labour, Social Security and Welfare)

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² Provisions for leave arrangements are also included in other kinds of Collective Labour Agreements (i.e. sectoral, professional, and enterprise), which are signed between employers and confederations of large sub-sectors of the economy (e.g. the banking sector) or enterprises of the wider public sector (e.g. the electricity company). Due to the fact that such agreements cannot include worse provisions than the minimum standards included in the National General Collective Agreement, they usually have improved provisions for working parents.

a. Maternity leave (basic leave – Άδεια Μητρότητας; special leave for the protection of maternity – Ειδική Άδεια για την Προστασία της Μητρότητας)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- Basic leave: 17 weeks – eight weeks must be taken before birth and nine weeks after birth. It is obligatory to take the full amount of leave.
- Special leave: six months, granted after basic Maternity leave and before the beginning of the use of flexible working (reduced hours of daily work).

Payment and funding

- Basic leave: 100 per cent of earnings, on the condition that these do not exceed those granted to insured persons who belong to the highest insurance class of IKA, the social insurance fund of all employees working under private law contracts, i.e. in effect, there is an upper limit on payment. The leave is funded by IKA and OAED, the Manpower Employment Organisation which is, *inter alia*, the social insurance fund for income protection against unemployment.
- Special leave: minimum daily wage agreed in the National General Collective Agreement and lately determined by law, as well as social insurance coverage. It is funded by OAED.
- Maternity leave (both basic and special) is fully insured and gives entitlement to full pension rights.

Flexibility in use

- Basic leave: none, except for when leave can start. If the birth takes place before the time envisaged, the rest of the leave can be granted after the birth, so long as the total time taken remains at 17 weeks.
- Special leave: if the parent, with the employer's agreement, makes use of the right to take a continuous time off work, instead of working reduced hours (see 1.i.e.), then the special leave is taken after this leave.

Eligibility

- Basic leave: to ensure full compensation, 200 working days during the previous two years, irrespective of whether on a fixed-term or permanent contract (or citizenship). Mothers acquiring children through surrogacy are also entitled to receive the post-natal part of the leave.

- Special leave: those insured in IKA-ETAM (the largest social insurance fund) with fixed-term or permanent contracts. Mothers acquiring children through surrogacy are also entitled to receive this leave.
- Self-employed women, who are directly insured in the Social Security Fund for the Self-Employed (OAEE) and the United Fund for the Self-Employed (ETAA), and fully covered for medical and pharmaceutical care at the time of the child's birth, are entitled to get a monthly payment for four months. In the first case, the benefit is €150 per month; in the second case, it is €200 per month. The benefit is granted in a lump sum following an application by the insured mother after the date of birth. The payment is made by the above funds from their own budgets. No other leave rights are available for self-employed parents. Self-employed surrogate mothers, mothers acquiring children through surrogacy, and mothers that adopt children up to two years of age are also entitled to receive this benefit.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother

- None.

b. Paternity leave (Άδεια Γέννησης Τέκνου)

Length of leave

- Two working days at the time of the child's birth, paid by the employer.

Eligibility

- There are no length of service conditions.
- Regarding access for same-sex couples, there is some uncertainty. The National General Collective Agreement (2008/9) says that all leave provisions that address biological or adoptive parents are extended to foster parents. As foster parents can be same-sex couples, they should be able to access this leave via this route, but the law is not explicit.

c. Parental leave (Γονική Άδεια Ανατροφής)

Length of leave

- Four months per child for each parent. Leave is an individual entitlement that cannot be transferred.

Payment and funding

- None.
- Working parents taking Parental leave have full insurance coverage on the condition that they pay the full insurance contribution (of both the employee and the employer). The Parental leave time is considered as a time of insurance for both the establishment of the pension right and the determination of the amount of pension.

Flexibility in use

- Leave may be taken up to the child turning six years of age.
- Leave may be taken in one or several blocks of time, subject to agreement with the employer.
- If both parents work for the same employer, they cannot take leave at the same time and must decide together who is to use the leave first and for how long. The law does not specify whether parents working for different employers can take leave at the same time, but as leave is unpaid, it is unlikely that both parents would take it together.

Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)

- All employees who have completed one year's continuous or non-continuous employment with their present employer, irrespective of the type of contract they have (i.e. full-time, part-time, fixed-term or any other type of contract).
- Though the leave is for each child, it is necessary that one year of work with the same employer is completed after the end of any Parental leave taken for a previous child.
- Leave is granted by the employer according to a set of priorities: requests for Parental leave from parents of children with a disability or long-term illness or sudden illness and from single parents (due to the death of parent, total removal of parental responsibility, or non-recognition of the child) are dealt with as an absolute priority. So, though the employer cannot refuse Parental leave, they can negotiate with the employee to take it later if other employees who request leave at the same time meet the priority criteria.
- Non-biological parents in same-sex couples are not eligible for this leave.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parents

- As leave is allocated per child, the leave period is doubled for parents of twins and tripled for triplets.
- In the case of the death of one parent, or the total removal of parental responsibility, or non-recognition of a child, the amount of Parental leave granted to the other parent is doubled.
- Parents with a disabled child do not get additional Parental leave, but are eligible for carer's leave (see 1.i.e. below).

Additional note (e.g. if leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements; employer exclusions or rights to postpone)

- None.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

- A parent can take time off work with full payment, up to an estimated 3.6 months, as part of a scheme which also allows parents to work reduced hours. For more details, see 1.i.e. on 'flexible working.'

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave and pay

- For parents who adopt or foster a child younger than six years of age (with an extension to eight years of age if adoption or fostering procedures are not finished), the same regulations for Parental leave apply as for other parents.
- Adoptive parents of children up to the age of six are entitled to flexible working or a childcare leave (see 1.i.d.).

Time off for the care of dependants

- Leave for children's sickness: up to six working days per year per parent of unpaid leave if the parent has one child; up to eight working days if they have two children; and up to 14 working days if they have three or more children. The leave is also granted for other dependent members of the family (e.g. a disabled spouse or adult children, as well as disabled parents or unmarried sisters if their annual income is less than the basic income of an unskilled worker).
- Leave for visiting children's school: four working days' paid leave per year per parent for each child that attends school up to the age of 16, funded by the employer.
- Leave for parents of children with a disability: one hour per day, if the parent asks for it (unpaid and only applied in businesses with more than 50 employees).

- Leave for parents whose children (up to 18 years of age) need regular transfusion or dialysis, have cancer, or need a transplant: up to ten working days' paid leave per year, funded by the employer. This is an individual right. Parents of children up to 18 years of age who have significant learning difficulties, Down's syndrome, or autism are also entitled to this leave.
- Leave for parents due to the hospitalisation of a child (up to 18 years of age), which requires their immediate presence: up to 30 working days' unpaid leave per year, on the condition that the parent has exhausted their normal Parental leave. This is an individual right.
- Leave for widows, widowers, or unmarried parents caring for children: in addition to other leave, six working days' paid leave per year. If the parent has three or more children, the leave is eight working days per year. The leave payment is funded by the employer.

Flexible working

- Parents are entitled to work one hour less per day for up to 30 months after Maternity leave, with full earnings replacement. This is a family right and both working parents have an independent right to the use of this leave, after deciding who and for how long each will take the leave. If both parents are employees, they address a common declaration to their respective employers, specifying which parent is to use the entitlement; if parents plan to share it, they specify the period each one will use it for within the total entitlement period. The entitlement is granted to fathers in cases where the mother is self-employed, but not if she is not working. This may be taken as: two hours fewer per day for the first 12 months and one hour less per day for another six months; or, with the employer's agreement, in a block or blocks of time of equal time value within the 30-month period after Maternity leave. This last option, of converting reduced hours into a block or blocks of leave, means that a parent can take a number of months off work, up to an estimated 3.6 months. This leave – titled 'alternative use of reduced hours as leave for the care of children' – is considered part of working time, so is paid and funded by the employer with no upper limit on payment.

Specific provision for (breast) feeding

This is covered by National Employer-Workers' Agreements.

ii. Public sector (responsibility of the Department of Interior)³

a. Maternity leave (Άδεια Μητρότητας)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- Five months: two months must be taken before birth and three after birth. It is obligatory to take the full amount of the leave.

Payment and funding

- 100 per cent of earnings, with no upper limit on payment.
- Maternity leave is fully insured and gives entitlement to full pension rights.
- Funded through general taxation.

Flexibility in use

- If the birth takes place before the time envisaged, the rest of the leave can be granted after the birth, so long as the total time taken remains at five months. If the birth takes place after the time envisaged, the leave is extended until the actual birth date, without any respective reduction in the post-natal leave.

Eligibility

- There are no conditions linked to length of service.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother

- Childbearing mothers who need special therapy and have exhausted their sick leave are granted paid childbearing leave.
- In the case of multiple births, Maternity leave after the birth is extended by one month for each additional child.
- For every child after the third, the length of post-natal leave is extended by two months.

b. Paternity leave (Άδεια Γέννησης Τέκνου)

³ The leave entitlements described in this section cover civil servants, employees of public entities, and local government, as well as any other employee in the above bodies not covered by special regulations.

- Two working days' paid leave at the time of the child's birth, funded by the employer.

Eligibility

- There are no conditions linked to length of service.
- Regarding access to leave by same-sex couples, there is some legal uncertainty. Foster parents can be same-sex and the law refers to foster parents in terms of special leave for adoptive and foster parents (see 1.ii.e.), as well as Parental leave, but there is no mention of foster parents regarding Paternity leave.

c. Parental leave (Άδεια χωρίς αποδοχές)⁴

Length of leave

- Up to five years per parent. Leave is an individual entitlement that cannot be transferred.

Payment and funding

- None, except for the case of three or more children where three months of the leave are fully paid by the employer and funded through general taxation.
- Working parents taking Parental leave have full insurance coverage, on the condition that they pay the full insurance contribution (of both the employee and the employer). The Parental leave time is considered as a time of insurance for both the establishment of the pension right and the determination of the amount of pension.

Flexibility in use

⁴ Public sector workers are also eligible for the Parental leave entitlement that applies to private sector employees (see above), since this leave is based on legislation that applies to both private and public sectors (Law 4075/12, incorporates the EU Directive 2010/18 on Parental leave). Unlike the unpaid Parental leave that exclusively covers public sector employees, this leave safeguards the employees' rights (i.e. it is considered as working time that ensures social security rights and does not affect any other employee rights such as leave rights, professional advancement, pensions etc.) (The Citizen's Ombudsman, Annual Report 2014). The five-year leave provision included in this section was introduced in 2011, as a minor provision in a multi-purpose law; previously the period was two years. It is a provision that gives the opportunity to civil servants to use unpaid leave for 'serious personal reasons.' When the European Directive on Parental leave was first introduced in Greece, an addition was made that allowed civil servants to use this leave as Parental leave.

- Leave may be taken at any time up to the child turning six years old.
- The law does not specify whether parents working for the public sector can take leave at the same time, but as leave is unpaid it is unlikely that both parents would take it together.

Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)

- An employee can use this leave if their spouse does not make use of the childcare leave at the same time (see 1.ii.d. below).
- An employee can make use of this leave even if their spouse is not working.
- In cases of separation, divorce, widowhood, or birth without marriage, only the parent that cares for the child is entitled to this leave.
- Non-biological parents in same-sex couples are not eligible for this leave.
- There are no conditions linked to length of service.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parents

- In the case of three or more children, three months of the leave are paid.
- Parents with a disabled child do not get additional Parental leave, but are eligible for leave for the care of dependants (see 1.ii.e. below).

Additional note (e.g. if leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements; employer exclusions or rights to postpone

- None.

d. Childcare leave (άδεια ανατροφής or μειωμένο ωράριο εργασίας)

A parent can take nine months of childcare leave with full payment as an alternative option to a scheme which allows parents to work reduced hours (see section 1.ii.e. below on flexible working). The leave is paid by the employer, funded through general taxation, and is granted after the Maternity leave. The leave does not constitute a personal entitlement and can be used by either or both parents within the total nine-month period. For a parent who is unmarried, widowed, divorced, or has a severely disabled child, the leave is extended by one month. In

the case of multiple births, an extra six months is provided for each additional child.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave and pay

- Adoptive parents as well as foster parents are granted a three-month paid leave during the first six months after the adoption or foster care procedures are completed, if the child is under six years of age. If both parents are employees of the public sector, with a common statement to their respective services, they determine who and at what time intervals each will use this leave. One of the three months can be taken before adoption or fostering.
- We note that adoptive or foster parents have access to Parental leave if the child is under the age of six (with the possibility of expansion up to the age of eight, if adoption or project procedures have not been completed earlier). Adoptive parents of children up to four years of age also have the right to receive care leave. Adoptive fathers can also receive the two-day Paternity leave if the adopted child is younger than two years of age.

Leave for parents obtaining a child through surrogacy

- Parents that obtain a child through surrogacy are entitled a three-month fully paid leave immediately after the birth of the child. If both parents are employees of the public sector, with a common statement to their respective services, they determine who and at what time intervals each will use this leave.

Time off for the care of dependants

- Leave for children's illness: up to four working days of paid leave per year if the employee has one child; up to seven working days of paid leave per year if the employee has three children; up to nine working days of paid leave per year if the employee has four or more children; and up to eight working days of paid leave per year if the employee is a single parent.
- Leave for children's sickness: parents are entitled to one month of non-paid leave in the case of the hospitalisation of their child due to illness or an accident that requires their presence.
- Leave for visiting children's school: up to four working days of paid leave for one child, and up to five working days for two or more children. If the children attend different levels of schools, an extra day is granted. The leave is not a personal entitlement: i.e. if both parents work in the public sector, the total number of days is for both parents to share.

- Up to 22 working days of paid leave per year for employees whose children or spouses need regular transfusion or periodic therapy, or whose children have a serious learning difficulty or Down's syndrome. The leave does not constitute a personal entitlement, so can be taken by either parent or shared by both.
- Leave for employees with children or spouses with a disability: one hour per day, paid.

Flexible working

- Parents are entitled to work two hours fewer per day if they have children under two years of age, and one hour less per day if they have children between the ages of two and four, with full earnings replacement. As mentioned above (1.ii.d.), there is an alternative option for this leave: nine consecutive months off work after Maternity leave.
- Flexible working does not constitute a personal entitlement and can be used by either or both parents within the total entitlement period, with a common declaration addressed to their respective employers. However, the leave cannot be taken simultaneously by both parents.
- For a parent who is unmarried, widowed, divorced, or severely disabled, flexible working is extended by six months. In the case of the birth of a fourth child, flexible working is further extended by two years. In case of multiple births, flexible working is extended by six months for each child after the first one.
- Adoptive parents of children up to the age of four are entitled to flexible working or, alternatively, childcare leave (see 1.ii.d.).
- An employee supporting a child or partner with a serious disability can work one hour less per day, with full payment.
- All paid leave is funded through general taxation.

Specific provision for (breast) feeding

This is covered by law.

2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy

The maximum period of post-natal leave available in Greece is 72 months in the public sector and 16 months in the private sector. However, leave paid at a high rate only runs for 12 months and six months respectively. There is an entitlement to ECEC at five years of age, and attendance is compulsory for the year before the beginning of elementary school (i.e. from around six years of age). So, there is no gap between the end of post-natal leave and an entitlement to ECEC for public sector workers, but a gap of more than three years for workers in

the private sector. Furthermore, there is a substantial gap, of at least four years, for all workers between the end of well-paid leave and an ECEC entitlement. However, starting from the school year 2018 - 2019 and continuing over the next two years, the gap will be reduced to a little more than two years, as compulsory ECEC attendance is extended from one year to two years. Levels of attendance at formal services for children both under and over three years of age are well below the average both for the countries included in this review and for OECD countries. For actual attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3. Changes in policy since April 2018 (including proposals currently under discussion)

Law 4590/2019 (article 34) has brought interesting improvements in the leave system of the public sector.

The most innovative development that the above law envisages is the introduction of leave for employees that wish to foster a child. The leave is equal to that for adoptive parents: that is, a three-month fully paid leave. The leave is gender-neutral and this may be due to the fact that fostered children are of different ages at the time when the foster care process takes place, so the presence of the mother is not perceived as crucial as in the case with new-born or very young children. There is, however, a second reason for this gender-neutrality, and this stems from an earlier law (4538/2018) which gives, for the first time, the right to same-sex couples (bound with a co-habitation agreement) to foster children. We note that same-sex couples do not have the right to marry or adopt children.

Law 4590/2019 (article 34) also gives an adoptive father who is an employee of the public sector the right to the adoption leave previously reserved only for mothers.

Under the same law and the same article, employees of the public sector that become parents through surrogate motherhood, are entitled to a three-month fully paid leave. We note that this law is based on another law (voted through a year earlier) that addressed only mothers acquiring children through surrogacy (i.e. they are entitled to receive the post-natal part of the Maternity leave and the six-month special Maternity leave for private sector employees) (Law 4488/2017, article 44). Self-employed surrogate mothers and mothers acquiring children through surrogacy are also entitled to receive the maternity benefit provided to self-employed mothers (Law 4488/2017, article 45).

Finally, Law 4590/2019 (article 34) extends the leave for the care of sick children to up to seven working days (it was previously five) of paid

leave per year, if the employee has three children; up to nine working days (it was previously five) of paid leave per year if the employee has four or more children; and up to eight working days (it was previously six) of paid leave per year if the employee is a single parent.

In a special report on Equal Treatment 2017 (published in December 2018), the Greek Ombudsman notes that there are 'unfair deviations in the protection of workers/employees.' In Maternity and Parental leaves, there are different and often very limiting conditions, depending on the sector of work (public or private) and the type of the contract they have (permanent, unlimited duration, or fixed-term). One such case was the refusal of the Ministry of Education to provide substitute teachers with the right to take the care leave in a block or blocks instead of reduced hours, a matter raised to the Ministry by the Greek Ombudsman. The Ministry of Education responded positively, and with Law 4599/2019 article 26, biological, adoptive, and foster mothers that work in public educational services as substitute teachers, or members of the special teaching personnel, or special assisting personnel with private law contracts are entitled to a paid care leave of three months and 15 days, after the end of Maternity leave or after the completion of adoption or foster care procedures, if they do not use the provision of reduced working hours. Furthermore, the Greek Ombudsman, in the same report, notes that pregnant women or women returning to work from Maternity leave are often discriminated against, something that was very much happening during the years of the crisis, and seems to have continued.

One must also note that, as from February 2019, the minimum wage that was significantly reduced in 2012 (22 per cent for employees over the age of 25 and 32 per cent for employees under the age of 25), under the Memorandum signed between Greece and its lenders, was partly reinstated: i.e. 11 per cent rise for employees over the age of 25 and 27 per cent increase for employees below the age of 25. This means that the special Maternity leave benefit equal to the minimum wage has been raised too.

4. Uptake of leave

There is no information on the uptake of the various types of leave. Statistics provided by the Labour Inspectors' Authority on private sector employees record people on leave by sex; however, there is no information about how many employees are eligible, but do not make use of their entitlement. Furthermore, these statistics are collected under the equal treatment legislation and do not provide any data on the uptake of leaves that apply exclusively to mothers.

Anyhow, it seems that, regarding leaves where both parents have entitlement rights, it is the mothers who overwhelmingly use the leave. On the basis of data from the Labour Inspectorate's 2016 annual report (the latest available data), we have developed the following table:⁵

Leave category	Uptake of leave	
	In every 1000 male employees	In every 1000 female employees
Care leave (paid)	9	160
Parental leave (not paid)	3	50
Leave to visit the children's school	90	350
Leave due to illness of dependent members	2	40

To become a meaningful indicator, the percentage should refer, of course, to the share of eligible mothers or fathers respectively.

⁵ Hatzivarnava E., (2019), 'Parental and other care leaves: Significant progress, fragmentation and inequalities,' in Karamessini, M. and Symeonaki, M. (forthcoming), *Reconciliation between Work and Family in Greece: The birth, development and assessment of a policy*, Athens: Nissos (in Greek).